**Argumentative Essay I - Poetry Analysis**

**1. Thesis:**

The last thing that will come to you in your study of a poem, but the first thing that should appear in your paper is your argument. The claim should be how the poet creates the theme with the following ideas.

* what the poem is about (narrative and plot)
* the meaning of the poem
* generally how form shapes and contributes to meaning
* the major stages or steps in the poem, how the action and meaning are shaped from first to last (plot and climax are useful terms here)

**2. Structure:**

Let the shape of the poem guide the structure of your paper. You should imagine that your reader is intelligent but does not have the poem in front of him/her for close scrutiny. If the reader has to move back and forth between your paper and the poem, you have more work to do. If you discuss meaning and form separately, furthermore, the reader will have to jump back and forth in your paper. This is also not a good thing. You want the reader to move smoothly through the poem, expertly guided by your argument and analysis.

If the poem is divided into natural units such as stanzas or the quatrains of a Shakespearean sonnet, the poem's structure helps you easily structure your paper. If there are many stanzas, you may have to organize them into larger units of meaning.

**3. Biographical Information**

As part of your paper, you need to include biographical information about the poet. This biographical information should add to the depth of understanding of the poem and its theme.

**4. Historical Context**

At times, the historical context of the poem is important. As part of your analysis, you should include historical information about the time and place that the poem was written or that the poem is referring.

**5. Analysis:**

For each unit of the poem (as you have divided it up), explain what is happening (narrative and plot) and how the structure of the poem shapes its meaning. This includes features such as—

* stanza form
* patterns of imagery
* word choice (diction) and tone (meanings as well as sounds of words)
* figures of speech, figurative language including simile, metaphor, personification
* sound devices, alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, stress, meter, onomatopoeia
* symbolism and allusion
* structure, organization, pace (repetitive structure, narrative structure, logical structure)
* irony, understatements, hyperbole
* lengths of sentences, use of punctuation, repetitions, shifts from colloquial to formal language

Each unit of the poem will produce a paragraph or more of analysis. Within each paragraph, you should consider organizing your information so that you move from the largest to the smallest formal units or from the most important to the least important for this section of the poem. In other words, if stanza form is important to understanding this portion of your poem, discuss it before discussing a small detail such as rhyme scheme. However, if rhyme is very important to meaning, then spend more time on rhyme.

* from largest to smallest formal units
* from most to least important formal features

Be careful also not to be redundant. In other words, you don't have to discuss the stanza form of a regular ode in every paragraph of your paper, only in those where it is important to meaning or where it works in a way different from the ways in which you have already discussed. In short, discuss those features that are important specifically for this section of your poem.

**6. Quotations:**

When analyzing the sections of your poem, you will want to refer to specific words or lines in the poem itself. Don't quote long sections of the poem. Incorporate quotations into your own sentences and focus on those words or lines that are really significant to your interpretation.

**7. Conclusion:**

Obviously, you need to wrap up your argument. How do you make the conclusion more than a recapitulation of the thesis?

**8. Research**

You will need to have at least three sources as part of your research. You should use that documentation for biographical information, historical information and other critical analysis of the poem. At no time should you directly quote from the text that you are researching. You should paraphrase your sources quickly and concisely.

You will need to use MLA style citations and a works cited for your paper.

There will be links on my web page that will direct you to appropriate web resources.

**9. Things to keep in mind:**

* identify the title of the poem and author in the first few sentences
* use careful and detailed examples from the poem to illustrate how the poetic elements contribute to the theme
* quote the poem, as needed, but with focus and purpose
* avoid all personal reaction or response to the poem (no saying “I liked this poem because. . .” or “This poem was confusing!” or “Icky! I hate poetry!”)
* when writing about literature, use present tense
* you should attach a copy of your poem with your paper